

# Work/Life Newsletter

Work/Life News

April 2001

## *Extra, Extra...*



This is the Work/Life Team's (Team) first issue of the Work/Life Newsletter that will be coming to you on a quarterly basis. We want to keep you informed on what your Team is working on regarding work/life issues. We will have regular articles, such as new items on our web site, regional and office updates, focus and task areas, wellness, and other work/life issues. If you have any ideas for our newsletter, please contact your representative—because this newsletter is for you!

## *Work/Life Team Background*



The Work/Life Team, formerly known as the Work and Family Team (WAFT), was established in 1995. The Team provides a focal point for work/life programs within Reclamation. This Team assisted in the quick advancement of many contemporary programs in Reclamation and constantly explores new programs while expanding existing ones. The Team partners with human resources staff and employee unions to initiate changes to basic policy, develop new policy, and provide support for work/life programs. Through active outreach activities, the Team maintains relationships with OPM, the Families and Work Institute, and other experts to learn from experiences in the private sector and other Government agencies.

Employees wanting information regarding a particular issue are encouraged to contact their Team representative, who can help them locate resources. Our purpose is not to “go to bat” for an employee wanting support on a particular issue, but rather to educate employees and supervisors on the pros and cons and to help locate success stories.

Examples of work and life issues are: child and elder care, fitness and wellness programs, alternative work

schedules, part-time employment, job-sharing, telecommuting/flexiplace, and leave sharing.

## *Our Web Site*



The Work/Life Team sponsors an excellent web page full of information on work and life initiatives that can be found at <http://www.usbr.gov/waft>. Our site links to other sites covering child care, career management, employee assistance, financial, general work and family sources, health, jobs, newsletters, telecommuting, travel, and violence prevention.

Another great feature of our web page is “Talk to Work/Life.” Use this to ask any question concerning work/life programs, and a work/life representative will contact you. This is also a good place to suggest new programs/initiatives you would like researched.

## *Commissioner's Outstanding Quality of Life Program Award*

The Team sponsors the Commissioner's Outstanding Quality of Life Programs Honor Award to recognize employees and managers who demonstrate outstanding, innovative achievements in advocating, recommending, or implementing a program or a special activity that promotes balancing a career and personal needs of employees and their families.

We were pleased to have 17 nominees last year throughout Reclamation. Although the Team felt all nominees were winners, we recommended one winner for each award to the Commissioner. We want to thank these nominated employees for helping promote the balance between work and life.

*The Manager's Award* recipient was **Jerry Gregg** (PN Region) who demonstrated innovation in implementing a variety of work/life programs throughout the entire area office. One example was permitting two employees to work at home while recovering from

health-related problems. Additional nominees for the Manager's Award were:

**Dennis Breitzman** (GP Region) for dedication and commitment in promoting and implementing programs such as the Family Support Room to help employees balance career and personal responsibilities.

**Curt Brown** (GP Region) for his efforts in coordinating work schedules with the personal needs and schedules of his employees.

**Diana Cardon** (RSC) for her support and continued dedication to providing employees with a well-rounded work and family life.

**Shannon Cunniff** (Washington, DC) for encouraging all of her staff to prepare the necessary paperwork in advance so all employees would be eligible for occasional telecommuting.

**William Gloor** (GP Region) for his sensitivity to needs of fellow employees and willingness to accommodate these needs both within and outside the workplace.

**John Lawson** (GP Region) for improving employee morale by encouraging employee attendance at a Financial Planning Training Seminar.

**James Meredith** (MP Region) for allowing employees to use flextime to meet the needs of families while holding down full-time jobs.

**Terry Smith** (LC Region) for encouraging the use of part-time employment, flexible schedules, leave policies, work at home program, and the Family Friendly Leave Act.

*The Employee Award* recipient was **Nancy DeCenso** (LC Region) for her outstanding work supporting work/life programs in the Phoenix Area Office. She promoted participation in programs to enhance the balance between the careers and personal needs of employees and provided consistent attention to employee morale. Additional nominees for the Employee Award were:

**Gayle Kunkel-Shields** (GP Region) for her support to outlying offices, her expertise, and can-do attitude.

**Betsy Morse** (GP Region) for bringing Weight Watchers meetings to the Regional Office.

**Linda Deavila** (GP Region) for her penchant for advocacy of all work/life programs and her consistent efforts at communicating with and keeping employees informed.

**Gayle Shanahan** (Denver) for being consistently vigilant in recognizing opportunities to utilize and enhance Reclamation's work/life programs.

**Northern California Area Office** (MP Region) for allowing a coworker to work part-time and have a flexible schedule to enable the employee to focus on family responsibilities.

**Snake River Area Office** (PN Region) for implementing an innovative program that allowed an employee to perform her duties and avoid a lengthy leave without pay status.

The above nominations illustrate the great strides being made throughout Reclamation to initiate policies and procedures centered on providing a more family friendly workplace.

We are currently soliciting nominees for the 2000 calendar year, so get your fingers busy typing up that nomination for this year's award for that employee or manager doing something special in your office.



The first person who contacts their Team representative to say they have read our first edition will receive a special gift.

## Region/Office Updates



In this section of our newsletter, we will highlight different Regions/Offices great happenings in the work/life arena.

The Great Plains Region is in its second successful year offering a weekly At Work Weight Watchers meeting during lunch. Meetings require 18-20 Government or non-Government employees (check with your local Weight Watchers or other diet centers). The region's

"Wellness" program has a provision that supervisors can pay up to one-half the cost of a weight loss program and provide a room for educational/health programs during non-duty hours.

The Dakotas Area Office in Bismarck successfully piloted a Family Support Room. Upon completion of the pilot program, they have decided to continue the use of this room. Similar rooms may be established in the Pierre and Rapid City, South Dakota offices if a need is recognized.

The purpose of the room is to assist employees in completing work at the office, if they choose, in circumstances such as a sick daycare provider, a noncontagious older parent or child who must be taken to an appointment, a nursing mother, or an employee recovering from medical treatment who can work a few hours at a time with quiet rest in between. This room is furnished with a computer, phone line, computer station, couch, a work table, TV/VCR, and chairs.

When the room is not being used for the above stated purposes, it is used for meetings or by Reclamation staff who are visiting the Bismarck office.

This successful venture is just one way in which the managers of the Dakotas area are working to create a family friendly workplace.

**W**ashington Office e-mails wellness topic information each week to all employees and posts items on the Work/Life bulletin board. The DOI health unit provides free flu shots and contracts for specialized exams such as bone density evaluation to be available on-site at the employees expense. A stress reduction lab has just been opened in the Main Interior Building. This lab is a quiet room with an ergonomic "stressless" reclining chair with audio and video equipment. An employee can select from written materials or audio and video tapes to learn about stress and related topics and practice strategies for relaxation. Information from FPMI's FedNews is posted daily on the Work/Life board.

**L**ower Colorado Regional Office supports an active wellness program in the Regional and Area Offices. Activities include a weekly e-mail distribution of information about various wellness/fitness topics; use of a free 2-hour stress

reduction workshop through the Region's Employee Assistance Program; flu shots; and blood pressure checks. Fitness reimbursement programs that allow reimbursement of fees for physical activity programs, health education, and smoking cessation programs are available to employees. Recently, the Phoenix Area Office brought a massage therapist on site to provide in-chair shoulder, upper back, and neck massages (paid for by the employee).

Use of the flexible workplace program is high. Primary reasons for its use include the need for uninterrupted work time; geographic convenience for other meetings and appointments; and continued productivity rather than taking leave for personal needs and medical conditions. Recently, the Regional Office held a lunch and learn session where supervisors were invited to educate each other by sharing details of successful flexible workplace arrangements.

Enhancing communication is emphasized through a variety of forms including regular all-employee staff meetings; "special projects" gatherings designed by employees; "rumor lunches" where the Deputy Area/Facility Manager for Parker/Davis/Hoover Dams invites 4 or 5 employees to be his guests for lunch; informal "Let's Talk" meetings; and special informal lunch and learn sessions where employees have an opportunity to meet and talk with top management.

**T**he Upper Colorado Region's Farmington Construction Office has two employees using the work at home program. One employee is experiencing a difficult pregnancy and the other is experiencing a life threatening illness. They are both working at home 5 days a week, and the program is working out very well.

**T**he Pacific-Northwest Region's work/life programs and activities are alive and well. The Reinvention Education Fund (REF), started in 1996 by the Board of Directors to provide educational opportunities and financial assistance to PN employees during off-duty hours, is still as popular today as it was during its inception. Approximately 24 employees across the region are currently taking advantage of this wonderful self-enhancement program. Another program that has been a great benefit to the PN employees is the Flexible Workplace program, under the work at home option. Managers and supervisors are realizing more and more the benefits of working

with employees, for employees, and still achieving their required work. Here are some comments from program participants and supervisors:

☞ “Flexiplace has once again proven to be a valuable tool in promoting work/life in the Bureau of Reclamation.”

☞ “Flexiplace has allowed [the employee] to protect her health while remaining a productive, contributing employee of the Bureau of Reclamation.”

☞ “Because of the work/life programs and the flexibility of those I work with, I have been able to return to work with a minimum of worry. I am very grateful to all who have contributed to this situation and to Reclamation for endorsing programs such as this.”

☞ “It has given the employee valuable time to spend with her young family and yet maintain her skill set for the day she returns to full-time employment—a true win/win situation.”

On a softer side, employees in the Boise Regional Office who want to get a 15-minute massage for \$10 may do so every Wednesday from the Federal Occupational Health Unit. Julie Weaver, RN, of the health unit started this service well over a year ago when employees had inquired about massages. She arranged for a certified masseuse and since then employees have taken full advantage of this work/life benefit. Too much tension and stress in your life? Take a break and get to the health unit quick; sign-up sheets fill up fast!

## Wellness Tip

### Make Sure Your Plant Workout Doesn't Lead to Pain



Gardening can be enjoyable, relaxing, and a good way to exercise. Experts believe 30 minutes of sustained daily physical activity—including gardening and yard work—can help protect your health in several ways.

To get the most from your yard workout and minimize risk of muscle strain, remember these tips:

Warm up your muscles before beginning: Walk briskly, jog, or use your exercise machine for 5 to 10 minutes. A regular stretching routine can increase joint flexibility and save you days of discomfort in your back, shoulders, and legs.

Pace yourself so you don't overdo it. An extra 20 minutes of garden work one day isn't worth spending the next day in bed recovering. As you strengthen your muscles, you can lengthen your work periods.

Take breaks to avoid fatigue. Injuries usually occur when you're tired. If you're tired before you start, don't begin. If you get tired while working, stop and rest.

Protect your back! Minimize bending and twisting. Use light-weight, long-handled rakes, hoes, and digging tools to reduce exertion and stretching.

Protect your joints by changing positions and activities often. For relief from kneeling, sit on a small stool to reduce strain.

Protect yourself from the sun. During warm months, garden in the early morning or evening to avoid intense heat. Wear a hat and sunscreen and drink plenty of water.

Garden all year instead of in seasonal bursts. For example, begin raking leaves when they start falling and rake often. Think of yard work as cross-training to be combined with other types of physical activity.

**Source:** *Body Bulletin*, June 2000

## Team Members



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